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ABSTRACT

The paper reviews work being done by two established Department of Education (ED) committees which are addressing concerns and issues related to rural education--the Intra-Departmental Committee on Rural Education (with representation from all 14 offices or units in the Department) and the Federal Intra-Agency Committee on Education's Rural Education Subcommittee (with membership drawn from across the Federal Government). Priorities which have arisen as a result of national conferences are noted. Among activities listed for the Intra-Departmental Committee are developing a resource directory of rural education contacts within the Department and compiling indexed summaries of the Department's 43 programs and thousands of projects related to rural education. A Rural Education/Small Schools Network has been formed and the needs it is addressing are noted. Activities covered for the Inter-Departmental Committee include preparing a consolidated report on all Federal activities related to rural education, determining the total Federal cost of those activities, identifying any inconsistency of effort among those activities, and determining what impact ED initiatives in rural education have on other Federal agencies. The conference's theme, "The Year of the High School," is addressed by stressing that rural high schools need extraordinary resources and extraordinarily resourceful teachers to compensate for their isolation. (BRR)

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RURAL EDUCATION: A NATIONAL COMMITMENT

Rural Education Association Annual Conference
Rockport, Maine
October 11, 1982

General Assembly Luncheon Address

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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I welcome the opportunity to meet with you at this 74th Annual Conference of the Rural Education Association. I commend your Association's leadership and the conference planning committee for such an interesting and solid agenda and selection of such a beautiful site. I wish my schedule would permit me to stay with you for the entire conference.

You people are important to the future of this country! You and this organization represent much of what is good, strong, enduring and promising, both in our society and in our educational system! REA has been most effective in providing leadership to and representing rural education, including teachers, administrators and State and regional agencies. We acknowledge that leadership and pledge our continued support and cooperation.

I bring you greetings and best wishes from Secretary Bell. I met with him this past week to report on our FY 1982 ED rural education initiatives, and to discuss our FY 1983 agenda. Secretary Bell and I are both rooted in rural America. We appreciate its character and contributions; we understand its issues and concerns; we respect its constituents and are dedicated to improving educational opportunities for rural America!

I also bring greetings from the two established Department of Education committees which are addressing some of the many very deserving concerns and issues related to rural education in

this Nation. These two committees are our Intra-Departmental Committee on Rural Education, with representation from all 14 offices or units in the Department, and our Federal Intra-Agency Committee on Education Rural Education Subcommittee with membership drawn from across the Federal Government. It is my privilege to chair both of these committees. These two committees represent a significant investment of time, energy, and other resources at the Federal level - an investment in the interest of rural education and a recognition of the importance of rural education. Dr. Duane Nielsen serves as Vice Chair and Program Manager for both of these committees and Dr. Norman Hearn works closely with us.

In a few minutes I will review with you what we are now doing, and hope to accomplish, through these two committees. But first, I want to acknowledge and endorse the deserving importance and significance of rural education programs, our rural people, and our rural heritage. Historically, the United States has been a country dominated by rural influences, rural leadership, and its rural education system. Rural America has contributed heavily to a positive, basic value structure that has helped shape our society and has produced many of our Nation's leaders.

Some say the present generation of adult professional and political leadership may well be our last to come from predominately small schools and rural communities. As recently as 50 years ago, about half the enrollment in public schools was scattered throughout 128,000 school districts; now, there are only 16,000

districts. Millions of today's older adults attended the 150,000 one-room schoolhouses that existed only 45 years ago. Less than 1,500 such schools remain, almost all of them in very isolated areas. But, the rural influence is far more than just a legacy of memories. Witness the trend of return migration, not only to a more rural residence but also to those traditional rural values of neighborliness, trust, openness, independence, and self-reliance. The past decade's historic reversal of population movement and the present decade's renewed emphasis on those traditional community-centered values have placed rural America in a new context.

During the 1970's, for the first time in the Nation's history, the growth of our cities stopped, while the real decline of rural population was reversed for the first time since the census of 1890. These demographic shifts reflect a reassertion of America's historic rural values; a preference for smallness, friendliness, stability, natural surroundings, and family life. The appeal and influence of those values remains strong. They are preferred by a majority of Americans according to the Gallup poll. Sixty million Americans now live in non-metropolitan areas and 75% of all non-metropolitan counties gained population during the 1970's. Nearly one-third of the Nation's elementary and secondary school students attend schools in small towns and rural areas. There are more school districts with fewer than 1,000 students than there are those above that.

Of necessity, rural school districts attempt, and frequently succeed, to do more with less. Rural school districts average less spending per pupil than urban districts - about 20 percent less. Of the 45 States that analyzed expenditures by population density for 1976-77, 35 reported that non-metropolitan areas spent less than the State average. Most of the States that did report higher non-metropolitan expenditures were in the West, with sparsely populated rural areas, where transportation expenditures, for example, were four times greater than in their metropolitan centers. Less money has resulted in fewer educational services in rural areas, however, the block grant initiatives of this administration are reducing that disparity.

A 1979 survey by the Department of Housing and Urban Development concluded that in the 1,000 small communities studied, the residents "are proud of their public schools and consider them an asset." The annual Gallup poll on the public attitude toward public schools consistently reports the highest satisfaction among residents of small towns and rural areas.

Jonathan Sher, Associate Dean of Education, University of North Carolina, has opened many eyes to the vitality of rural schools through his prolific research and writing on rural education. He cites numerous studies refuting the "bigger is better" theory of school organization. They show, he says, that when IQ and

socio-economic status of students are controlled, those attending small schools are as academically well-prepared as those in the cities.

Roger Barker and Paul Gump found that in smaller schools there was more involvement of students in activities that reinforced their academic work, and higher quality in the involvement, than was evident in larger, consolidated schools. The proportion of students who participated in these reinforcing and developmental activities reached a peak in high schools with enrollments between 61 and 150. The proportion of participants was three to twenty times as great in the small schools as in the largest school. Sher believes that the slower pace and less pressured environment, the spirit of cooperation, the opportunities for leadership development, the less formal interactions among students, staff and parents are unique, but hard to measure, qualities of rural schools.

The one constant about rural schools is their difference - they are as different from each other as they are from the urban systems which so often serve as their contrast. We salute that difference - that independence! Ann Campbell, Commissioner of Education for Nebraska and member of the Secretary's Commission on Excellence, captured the relationship of small rural schools to the total education enterprise in her address to our National Rural Education Seminar held in Washington this past May. She told

of an elderly stonemason, who was carefully building a wall along the side of a country estate, when he was asked by the owner why he was using so many small stones around the large ones. "They are needed to keep the big ones in place," he explained. "If I leave small stones out, the big ones will not hold and the wall will fall."

Now, for a moment, let's turn to a bit of background, quite familiar to some of you, that undergirds our commitment to and helps shape our planning for Rural Education. In May of 1979, a National Seminar on Rural Education was held at the University of Maryland, sponsored by the U.S. Office of Education and the National Institute of Education in the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, and the Science and Education Administration of the Department of Agriculture. Some of you here today were instrumental in the planning and conducting of that seminar. Twenty-two papers were commissioned in advance of the seminar and were used as a basis for discussion. Over 100 participants representing organizations and agencies with interest in rural education reviewed and critiqued the papers and prepared 28 recommendations for a Federal agenda on rural education.

During September of 1979, the U.S. Office of Education sponsored eleven regional rural roundtable discussion groups which addressed in detail these 28 recommendations. Nearly 300 rural participants attended one of the eleven roundtable discussion groups and over 200 more submitted their comments and suggestions by mail. Although a very determined segment of the participants consistently

questioned the Federal Government's role in rural education, the majority of these over 500 rural constituents agreed with each of the 28 recommendations and considered them feasible activities for a Federal Rural Education Initiative. The responses of these eleven groups produced six strong priorities for such an initiative. These six priorities called for the Federal Government to:

1. examine Federal financing formulas and other funding mechanisms to ensure local flexibility;
2. establish a Federal Government's rural research agenda in conjunction with the rural constituency;
3. provide additional support for transportation, facilities, and delivery systems in rural school districts;
4. enable and encourage rural school districts to combine funding from various programs;
5. support communication networks to share information among rural educators; and
6. support broad-based vocational education programs in rural areas.

As represented by these over 500 participants, the rural constituency repeatedly stated they desired to maintain local and State control over decisions affecting their rural schools. They also stated that existing Federal education programs place a disproportionately greater administrative burden on and are operationally less flexible in small rural schools than in large urban schools. They suggested replacing the categorical nature of Federal funding with the general revenue sharing type of assistance, instituting a sparsity factor into entitlement formulas.

This Administration has responded directly and emphatically to that recommendation. Rural LEAs no longer need apply at the Federal level for some previously 29 different sources of support, many of which were urban oriented and from which urban districts received the majority of the funding. LEAs are now funded on a population distribution formula. Under the recent block grant Title I, Chapter 2, provisions at least 80% of the State's allotment is distributed directly to the local district based on enrollment, adjusted upward for low population density areas to compensate for the higher cost in those areas. Paper burden and regulatory requirements have been drastically reduced.

Preliminary data from a current, not yet completed, NIE study of the implementation of Chapter 2, and its effect on rural school districts in eight States including Maine, indicate that funding to rural districts has significantly increased while funding to large urban centers has decreased. An Education Commission of the States study has compared 1981-82 categorical funding with 1982-83 block grant funding. In this comparison, Chicago has lost 31% while smaller districts have gained 8%; Minneapolis has decreased 55% while other smaller districts in Minnesota have increased an average of 23%; and Miami has a reduction of 18% while other districts in Florida have increased 9%.

I indicated earlier that I would review with you the activities of our two Department of Education committees which are addressing rural education issues. Our Intra-Departmental Committee on

Rural Education was formed in response to Section 206 of the Department's Organizational Act which directed the Assistant Secretary for Vocational and Adult Education to "provide a unified approach to rural education and rural family education through the coordination of programs within the Department and work with the Federal Interagency Committee on Education (FICE) to coordinate related activities and programs of other Federal departments and agencies." All 14 Assistant Secretaryships and major offices in the Department are represented on this committee, which I chair.

Our first meeting was held in February of 1982. At each of these monthly meetings, committee members report on activities supported or conducted by their offices which address the areas of rural education and rural family education. An in-depth, detailed presentation by one of the 14 offices is scheduled for each meeting. These reports are discussed and analyzed for potential coordination and for overlap or redundancy. Everett Edington, Director of ERIC/CRESS has met with our committee and we have invited your Executive Director, Joe Newlin, to do so at his earliest convenience.

In addition, subcommittees have assumed responsibility for specific tasks which have helped to coordinate and give emphasis to rural educuation activities. These include developing a resource directory of rural education contacts within the Department; compiling indexed summaries of the Department's 43 programs and thousands of projects related to rural education;

reviewing legislation, regulations, and procurement procedures for equitable emphasis on rural education; and assisting with the National Rural Education Seminar sponsored by OESE and the Horace Mann Learning Center in May. The committee has also reviewed and discussed the Department's rural education policy statement and a subcommittee has been working on that statement during the past two months. The subcommittee will report at our next committee meeting on Thursday of this week, October 14, and we will be making recommendations to the Secretary on the content of the policy statement and procedures best suited for the realization of that policy. We have solicited inputs from many groups and individuals as we seek to develop a realistic and viable Department of Education policy for rural education. You will be given an opportunity to review that policy statement and make suggestions later in this conference. We will welcome your input!

Linkages and continuing communication have been established with REA, Organizations Concerned with Rural Education (OCRE), the AASA Rural/Small School Network, the ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, FICE, USDA, and several other agencies and organizations. On July 1, 1982, our Office of Elementary and Secondary Education awarded the AASA a contract to pursue activities to help assure equity and quality in rural education and small schools. A Rural Education/Small Schools

Network has been formed which is addressing important needs of the Nation's rural and small school districts in the following manner:

1. Dr. Walter Turner's staff at AASA is operating a Rural/Small Schools Hot Line (call collect on 703/528-0700). Rural school administrators are invited to call in and discuss their priorities in providing quality education for rural/small school students.

2. A report on the Department's May 3-5, 1982 Rural Education Seminar will be developed which will serve as a resource for rural educators.

3. Four issue papers on matters of concern to rural/small school educators will be prepared. Topics will be selected with input from the Hot Line calls, the Rural Seminar report, and recent surveys done by AASA.

4. A summary paper on the definition of "rural/small" and "rural education" will be researched and written in an effort to help resolve State-to-State differences and bring together the concepts of various agencies and sources.

5. A Technical Assistance Manual for rural school districts will be prepared and published. The manual will include the definition of "rural education," sources of financial aid for rural schools, sources of technical assistance, and highlight issues and recommendations from the 1982 seminar.

We are well underway with the other Inter-Departmental Committee on Rural Education which I also referred to at the beginning of my comments. This subcommittee of FICE cuts across all Federal departments and agencies and has four immediate responsibilities:

1. To prepare a consolidated report on all Federal activities related to rural education.

2. To determine the total Federal cost of those activities.

3. To identify any inconsistency, overlap, or duplication of effort among those activities.

4. To determine what impact ED initiatives in rural education have on other Federal agencies.

As I am sure you have sensed by now, these activities are addressing the six priorities for a Federal initiative identified by the 1979 national and regional conferences and reaffirmed by the May 1982 national seminar. Because of its recentness and relevance to your work here this week, may I share a few comments on that seminar, "Ensuring Excellence in Education for Rural America" - as summarized by Ann Lewis who is preparing the report of the seminar:

"Although rural school administrators and rural communities in general often are wary of outside pressures for change, almost all of the rural education seminar speakers, whether rural educators, researchers, university faculty or public officials, said rural schools needed help. The proposed solutions varied greatly, from the establishment of a national "rural policy" to merely the exemption of rural schools from some paperwork regulations. It was obvious, however, that the past self-reliance and dogged determination of rural schools to survive despite neglect and inappropriate policies imposed on them, isn't good enough anymore. The same egalitarian goals -- to educate every child to their maximum potential -- that have characterized urban and suburban schools for the last two decades -- are shared by most rural educators. To give rural youth the option of staying or leaving, to prepare them to handle

changing social values and to take advantage of new technologies, to become the focal point for economic and cultural development within their communities, and to assure that we have the teachers and administrators who can shoulder these challenges will require many helping hands for our rural schools. The seminar clearly indicated that our rural schools need:

1. Adequately trained teachers and administrators.
2. Opportunities to develop rurally-relevant curricula.
3. Assessment of the instructional needs of rural students.
4. Long-range planning.
5. Sensitivity to the "rural situation" by State and national officials.
6. Careful examination of the impact of decreased Federal funding in rural areas.
7. Regional, State, and national data banks applicable to rural needs.
8. Coalitions of civic, community, church, educational, and other agencies and organizations working together.
9. And, underlying all of these needs, is the critical need to foster leadership in rural local communities. Rural communities are rich with leadership opportunities, as Governor Al Quie pointed out at the seminar, but various pressures on rural school systems will require that leadership to assess the undeveloped human potential in their communities and integrate outside help with traditional strengths."

Your theme for this 74th REA Annual Conference is "The Year of the High School." Rural high schools need extraordinary resources and extraordinarily resourceful teachers to compensate for their isolation. Rural high schools have difficulty providing the variety of courses, the kinds of facilities

and the specialists to teach in them which characterize most urban and suburban schools. As Paul Natchigal has put it, "small rural schools need a different set of rules to play by." High school teachers need to be generalists, not specialists, able to teach more than one academic area and willing to work in an interdisciplinary fashion. They also need to know how to supervise and creatively direct independent study, especially when and if new technologies will enable students to have a broader range of resources.

High schools must build into their curriculum and services the notion of choice for students. Rather than an unexamined view that students will leave the community or an assumption, especially in poor areas, that they will always live in marginally productive rural areas, high schools should provide a basic curricula that will allow students to function well as adults wherever they are. Additionally, through vocational education, cooperative programs, exchanges, field trips and other programs, students need experiences with options outside of their communities.

The rural high school curriculum needs to draw from the school environment. Already richly endowed with community support, the small rural high school can repay with an investment in that community. Rural high school students can be the core of rural development in a community as has been so successfully demonstrated

each year in every State through the thousands of Building Our American Communities (BOAC) programs planned and conducted by high school vocational agriculture students.

One of our greatest rural resources, and one we are the proudest of, is our rural youth. My office sponsors, and strongly supports, nine national vocational education youth organizations. One of these organizations is the FFA - Future Farmers of America. Although it now includes many young men and women from urban areas in its membership, its half million members are predominately rural. The FFA exemplifies the best of what rural America has and will continue to contribute to this Nation. May I close, and reaffirm my confidence in and support for rural America, by quoting the first and last paragraphs of the FFA Creed:

"I believe in the future of rural America with a faith born not of words but of deeds - achievements won by the present, and past, generations in the promise of better days through better ways, even as the things we now enjoy have come to us from the struggles of former years.

I believe that rural America can and will hold true to the best traditions of our national life and that I can exert an influence in my home, my community (and my school) that will stand solid for my part in that inspiring task."

My sincere, best wishes for a successful and rewarding conference - thank you for inviting me!